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Programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999

Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001

Programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999**Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001****Sixth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions****Addendum**

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the reports of the Secretary-General on the construction of additional conference facilities at Addis Ababa (A/54/431) and unforeseen and extraordinary expenses (A/C.5/54/29); and the notes by the Secretary-General on the following subjects: proposed abolition of two General Service posts under income section 3, Services to the public (A/C.5/54/14); internal and external printing practices at the Organization (A/C.5/54/18); temporary assistance for meetings: requirements for 2000-2001 (A/C.5/54/19); rental of United Nations premises by press and other entities (A/C.5/54/25); proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001: section 26, Public information (A/C.5/54/27); and use of general temporary assistance for specific positions (A/C.5/54/33). During the consideration of the reports, representatives of the Secretary-General provided additional information.

Construction of additional conference facilities at Addis Ababa

2. The report of the Secretary-General on construction of additional conference facilities at Addis Ababa (A/54/431) has been submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 39/236 of 18 December 1984.
3. The Advisory Committee notes from the annex to the report that, as at 30 June 1999, out of a total amount of \$115,228,494 authorized by the General Assembly between 1984 and 1997, disbursements amounted to \$114,084,919, leaving a balance of \$1,143,575, which includes outstanding obligations of \$618,126. Thus, the estimated balance of funds as at 30 June 1999 amounts to \$525,449. Upon inquiry, the Committee was informed that any balance of funds remaining at the end of the biennium would be reported to the General Assembly for a decision.
4. The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/431).



Unforeseen and extraordinary expenses

5. The report of the Secretary-General on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses (A/C.5/54/29) was submitted in response to the request by the Advisory Committee, in paragraph 126 of its first report on the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001¹ that the Secretary-General submit to the General Assembly at the main part of its fifty-fourth session an analysis reviewing the levels specified in the resolution of the Assembly on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses, together with proposals, if necessary, for adjustment of the levels.

6. With regard to the recommendation by the Secretary-General that his authority to commit without prior concurrence of the Advisory Committee be increased from \$5 million to \$10 million for activities relating to the maintenance of peace, the Committee notes, from paragraph 22 of the report, that in 1998 the total cost of activities related to good offices, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-building missions amounted to \$7,013,100 (\$3,602,200 funded under the \$5 million commitment authority granted by the General Assembly and \$3,410,900 funded from voluntary contributions). As at 15 October 1999, \$4.9 million had already been utilized in 1999 for such activities (\$4,037,900 from the \$5 million commitment authority and \$862,300 from voluntary contributions). Further, the Committee notes that if the estimated costs of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1237 (1999) of 7 May 1999, related to the establishment of expert panels on Angola (\$1 million) and those related to the appointment of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Balkans (\$1.4 million) were to be included in the 1999 requirements for unforeseen and extraordinary expenses, the total level of expenditures would amount to \$7.3 million.

7. The Advisory Committee understands that the situations in which the Secretary-General has recourse to paragraph 1 (a) of the most recent resolution on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses (resolution 52/223 of 22 December 1997) must be dealt with on an urgent and timely basis. It also recognizes that activities undertaken in the maintenance of peace constitute an expense of the Organization and should be subject to assessment on Member States and that voluntary contributions as supplementary funds should only be utilized in addition to, not in lieu of, assessed resources for activities related to the approved work programmes of the Organization. Therefore, on the basis of the figures provided in the report for the years 1998 and 1999, the Committee recommends that the authority of the Secretary-General to commit without the

prior concurrence of the Advisory Committee be increased to \$8 million.

8. With regard to the recommended revision of commitments certified by the President of the International Court of Justice relating to certain expenses of the Court, the Advisory Committee recognizes that the proposed changes represent technical adjustments. Accordingly, the Committee recommends their approval.

9. The Secretary-General proposes an increase, from \$10 million to \$25 million of his authority, on a decision of the Security Council, to enter into commitments relating to the maintenance of peace and security with the prior concurrence of the Advisory Committee before the preparation and submission of a budget for approval by the General Assembly. The Committee is of the opinion that experience has not so far provided a compelling reason to change the current arrangement. Furthermore, given the fact that the General Assembly is now in session year-round, in the view of the Committee there is enough flexibility built into the current arrangement. The situation could be monitored if developments are perceived to warrant a change.

Proposed abolition of two General Service posts under income section 3, Services to the public

10. As indicated in paragraph 2 of the note by the Secretary-General on this subject (A/C.5/54/14), the proposal for engaging an outside contractor to run the bookshop in Geneva has been made in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 under income section 3, Services to the public.

11. The proposed reorganization of the bookshop operations would result in the abolition of two General Service posts at Geneva that are currently allocated for the bookshop sales staff.

12. In its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001,² the Advisory Committee requested the Secretary-General to review the case for abolishing the two General Service posts at Geneva, as the proposal did not seem to be entirely substantiated.

13. As indicated in the note by the Secretary-General, following a review by the Secretariat, proposals for the abolition of two General Service-level posts in the Geneva Sales and Marketing Section were modified to abolition of just one post.

14. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the job description of the General Service post to be retained would entail monitoring bookshop activities and

financial aspects on a daily basis, developing new gift items and promoting the bookshop and gift shop through mail promotions, advertising of events, external exhibits and public relations.

15. The Advisory Committee recommends approval of the proposal contained in paragraph 3 of the note by the Secretary-General to abolish one General Service-level post in the Geneva Sales and Marketing Section so that one General Service-level post may be maintained.

Internal and external printing practices at the Organization

16. The note by the Secretary-General on internal and external printing practices at the Organization (A/C.5/54/18) was submitted in response to the concern expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 78 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 about the need for the Organization to have a rational basis for determining the mix of external and in-house printing. The Committee requested that comparative data for all United Nations headquarters be submitted to the General Assembly early at its fifty-fourth session. The Committee also recommended that the Secretary-General prepare a comprehensive report for submission to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session containing information on the total cost of operating the printing facilities at Geneva and New York, the capacity of all the plants and the printing workload, as well as information on the printing programme that is contracted out and comparative costs for in-house and external printing.³

17. The Advisory Committee notes the considerable improvement in efficiency that has been made in the printing programme in New York through the introduction of new technologies. Turn-around time is now shorter, the capability of the printing facility to produce diverse and complex publications has been greatly enhanced, the range of services and materials that need to be outsourced has been reduced and the number of posts in the Reproduction Section has been reduced.

18. The Advisory Committee notes the development by the Reproduction Section in New York of a computer programme to estimate the cost of individual jobs and its use to determine whether or not particular jobs should be outsourced. The Committee commends this effort and encourages further development of the programme. The development of a similar system in Geneva should be closely coordinated with the Reproduction Section in New York so as to avoid any duplication of work and to ensure comparability of data, with a view to extending it elsewhere.

The Committee is also of the opinion that a method should be developed to figure in maintenance and overhead costs. Developments should be reported in the context of the next proposed programme budget.

19. In the opinion of the Advisory Committee, the note by the Secretary-General only partially responds to the request by the Committee in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. The Committee expects that the comprehensive report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session will fully address the issues raised by the Committee, in particular with regard to the situation at the United Nations Office at Geneva. In this context, the report should also assess the implementation of the observations and recommendations of the comprehensive study on conference services contained in document A/C.5/49/34 and Corr.1. The findings and conclusions have been endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/221 of 23 December 1994. The Committee also requests that additional information be included in that report on measures taken to ensure coordination between printing facilities at different duty stations; to achieve economies of scale, including through the development of common services among all United Nations entities at a duty station; and to ensure that the way outputs are measured throughout the system is the same. The Committee also requests information on the potential for reducing the budget for printing, given the approximately 25 per cent reduction in hard-copy output since 1992-1993 and the productivity gains achieved.

Temporary assistance for meetings: requirements for 2000-2001

20. The note by the Secretary-General on temporary assistance for meetings: requirements for 2000-2001 (A/C.5/54/19) was submitted in response to concerns expressed by the Advisory Committee in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 regarding the reductions in requirements for temporary assistance for meetings in the amount of \$4,873,500 before recosting under section 2, General Assembly affairs and conference services, of the programme budget. In its report, the Advisory Committee stated that the estimates and the additional information given to the Committee did not contain sufficient justification for the proposed reductions. Bearing in mind the level and quality of services to be provided, the Committee requested the Secretary-General to provide further justification to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

21. In the opinion of the Advisory Committee, the note does not address the concerns it expressed in its first report on the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, nor does it reflect the specific problems faced by the Department with regard to the impact of resources on the effective delivery of services. Furthermore, it seems to the Committee that the methodology used to determine requirements for conference services, which is based on past usage, is driven by budget reduction concerns rather than actual demand for services. In this connection, the Committee believes that estimates of requirements for conference services should be based on, in addition to past experience: (a) meetings scheduled in the calendar of conferences; (b) conferences or meetings that may arise as the result of new legislative mandates; and (c) meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States. The Committee emphasizes that flexibility should be built into the methodology. The Committee recalls its comments in paragraph VIII.56 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997⁴ and paragraph VIII.144 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999⁵ that more should be done to provide better cost information on meetings and documentation and to make a detailed analysis of the actual level of demand and output for conference services, both for formal and informal meetings.

22. The Advisory Committee points out that the statistics used in the document are from 1998. Statistics must now be available for 1999 and they should have been indicated in the report.

23. The Advisory Committee understands that self-revision rates are on the rise and expresses its concern that this could have an adverse effect on the quality of translations produced. The Committee was informed that efforts were under way to enhance the quality of translated documents, but that both the interpretation and the translation services had been affected in their efforts to ensure quality and capacity by the restrictions imposed by the General Assembly in its decision 51/408 of 4 November 1996 on the temporary recruitment of retirees. Retired language staff are often the best source of qualified and experienced temporary assistance for those services. The General Assembly may wish to review this issue in all its aspects in the light of the problems faced by the services. In this connection, the Committee recalls paragraph 13 of its report on internal vacancies in the Secretariat of 20 November 1998 (A/53/691), in which it noted the decline of the proportion of retirees employed on a non-local basis and requested that the trend be monitored carefully in terms of quality of service.

24. With regard to computer-assisted translation, the Advisory Committee was informed that the software had been acquired in the middle of 1999 at a reasonable cost, but that it was not yet available in all the official languages. The Advisory Committee further understands that the software purchased will soon be superseded by upgraded software, thus further complicating the situation. While the Committee acknowledges the Secretariat's efforts to achieve efficiency gains through such technological innovations, it urges that present difficulties be rectified on an urgent basis. The Committee is concerned that the anticipated productivity gains will not entirely offset reductions to temporary assistance and, in this regard, recommends that the quality of services be monitored.

Rental of United Nations premises by press and other entities

25. The note by the Secretary-General on rental of United Nations premises by press and other entities (A/C.5/54/25) was submitted in response to the request by the Advisory Committee in paragraph VIII.67 of its first report on the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 that the Secretary-General survey the terms of the agreements under which the press and other entities occupy space in buildings owned and rented by the United Nations free of charge or for less than commercial rates.

26. Current rental practice of the United Nations is summarized in paragraph 5 of the note by the Secretary-General, where it is stated that the approach used by the United Nations to set rents "depends on the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and the tenant, and on the level of the tenant's contribution to the work of the Organization". In the opinion of the Advisory Committee, these criteria are far too general and, in fact, could be open to different interpretations. Furthermore, current practice as laid out in paragraphs 4 to 6 of the note has, in the view of the Committee, led to several inconsistencies that must be addressed.

27. In paragraphs 7 to 10 of the note by the Secretary-General tenants are broken down into four major groups: (a) organizations of the United Nations system, entities affiliated with the United Nations and other international organizations; (b) commercial entities providing support services to the Organization; (c) staff-related and staff affiliated bodies and entities; and (d) press and other media entities. Current practice with regard to the four groups of tenants is summarized using examples.

28. The Advisory Committee points out that it did not request a summary, but rather a survey. It has therefore requested a complete listing of United Nations tenants, including those that occupy space but do not pay rent, containing the following information: (a) the name of each organization/entity; (b) the amount of space occupied by each organization/entity in square feet; (c) rent paid per square foot; (d) maintenance and overhead charges paid; (e) actual percentage formula applied with reference to normal market rates; and (f) type of contract/agreement, in particular with reference to the "escape" clause. At the time of approval of the present report, the Committee had not yet received the information. It intends to revert to the matter upon receipt of the requested information.

**Proposed programme budget for the biennium
2000-2001: section 26, Public information**

29. In the context of its consideration of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001,⁶ the Advisory Committee noted that an amount of \$206,100 had been requested to cover the cost of personal service contracts related, *inter alia*, to the creation of search programmes and databases for the United Nations web site in official languages other than English. The Committee pointed out that no statement of programme budget implications had been submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session in connection with the adoption of resolution 53/208 C of 18 December 1998 and requested that cost estimates and a related Secretariat-wide plan be presented to the Assembly at the main part of its fifty-fourth session.

30. In response to General Assembly resolution 53/208 C, which, *inter alia*, stressed the need to achieve equal treatment of the six official languages on United Nations web sites, the Secretary-General submitted a report (A/AC.198/1999/6) to the Committee on Information at the first part of its twenty-first session, in May 1999, outlining three proposals, together with an indication of the magnitude of the resource requirements. At that session, in its draft resolution B, the Committee on Information decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it take note of the report and request the Secretary-General to develop further his proposals pertaining to proposal C. Under proposal C, the United Nations web site would be developed in all official languages, as staff and other resources permit, and parity would be introduced in modules.

31. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 6 of the note by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/54/27) that the Secretary-General has submitted a report (A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2) on proposal C, outlining three options,

together with an indication of the level of resource requirements, for consideration by the Committee on Information at its resumed twenty-first session in November 1999. At that session, the Committee on Information, in its revised draft resolution B, *inter alia*, decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it take note with appreciation, with reference to the reports of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/1999/6 and A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2), of the efforts of the Secretary-General to develop and enhance the United Nations web sites in all the official languages of the United Nations and requested him to pursue those efforts and to continue to develop proposals for consideration by the Committee on Information at its next session.⁷

32. The Advisory Committee also notes from paragraph 9 of the note by the Secretary-General that, should the Committee on Information make recommendations that would have programme budget implications, a statement would be prepared prior to its adoption of such recommendations.

33. The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/54/27).

**Use of general temporary assistance for
specific positions**

34. The note by the Secretary-General on the use of temporary assistance for specific positions (A/C.5/54/33) was submitted in response to the request by the Advisory Committee for information on that subject in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, with proposals for either temporary or established posts or an explanation of why the continued use of general temporary assistance would be necessary.

35. The Advisory Committee notes the statement, in paragraph 4 of the note by the Secretary-General, that general temporary assistance, in addition to being used to replace staff on maternity or sick leave or to ensure adequate staffing during peak workload periods, is used to fund specific positions which are associated with some degree of uncertainty as to the need for them to be retained in the definite future, either at their current level or in their current pattern of grades and categories. Such positions range from relatively long-term arrangements to new proposals for the biennium 2000-2001.

36. Upon enquiry as to why the Secretariat does not convert those positions to temporary posts, the Advisory Committee was informed that, in many of the cases, the uncertainty of the situation makes flexibility a necessity.

According to the representatives of the Secretary-General, arrangements for funding under general temporary assistance can be moulded to fit the situation in terms of duration and level of the position. The Committee does not question the need for flexibility, however, it is of the opinion that ample flexibility is afforded through the use of short-term or fixed-term contracts against temporary posts. It has been and continues to be the position of the Committee that general temporary assistance should only be used to replace staff on sick or maternity leave and for periods of peak workload. Furthermore, the Committee notes that many of the positions described in the note appear to involve functions of a continuing nature. Positions that represent a continuing need within the Organization should be regularized, that is, converted either to temporary or established posts. The appointment of staff under general temporary assistance is governed by the provisions of administrative instruction ST/AI/295 of 19 November 1982, paragraph 3 of which sets out the purposes for which such staff are to be appointed, as follows:

“(a) To assist in dealing with peak workloads, particularly when necessary to meet deadlines for the production of reports and other work, or when the work is not evenly distributed over the year;

“(b) To assist in dealing with unexpected demands on the regular staff which could not be foreseen;

“(c) To cover essential work which, as a result of vacancies, cannot be performed by regular staff; or

“(d) To provide services required for conferences and other short-term purposes that cannot be provided by regular staff.”

37. The Advisory Committee asked how many of the posts listed in the annex to the note by the Secretary-General corresponded to replacements for staff on sick or maternity leave or to staff hired to help cope with periods of peak workload. The response by the representatives of the Secretary-General was that “none” of the posts were for those purposes.

38. The Advisory Committee stresses that, in the area of administrative and budgetary practice, the Secretary-General should be guided solely by the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions. The Committee points out that the funding of positions that are of a continuing nature under general temporary assistance creates a lack of transparency and is a departure from approved budgetary practice with regard to general temporary assistance. In this connection, the Committee recalls paragraph 7 (c) of its first

report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, in which it stated that the budget line “other staff costs” should be broken down by component, that is, into amounts requested for: temporary assistance for meetings; temporary assistance to cover maternity and extended sick leave; supplementary staff for peak workloads or unforeseen special requirements; and overtime. Furthermore, the practice of terminating personnel after 11 months of service and then rehiring them, often after a very short break in service, also affects the transparency of the budgetary process. The Committee has requested additional information on the types of contracts used under general temporary assistance, their duration, what the associated benefits (including pension entitlements) are and whether the hiring of staff under general temporary assistance has an impact on the rights and entitlements of such staff. This information should be provided as soon as possible to both the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee.

39. Upon enquiry as to why the total figure (123) in the annex to the note did not match the figure in the table in paragraph 52 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (125), the Committee was informed that there had been an error in the original table in the number of positions listed under the Economic Commission for Africa.

40. The note by the Secretary-General separates the use of general temporary assistance for specific positions into four areas: (a) the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS); (b) the United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories; (c) human rights; and (d) subregional development centres and the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

41. In paragraph 5 of the note by the Secretary-General, it is indicated that positions have been proposed to be funded through general temporary assistance for the installation, operation, support and maintenance of IMIS. However, upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the 21 posts related to IMIS and listed in the annex to the note were all for maintenance of IMIS. In the opinion of the Committee, it is very clear that the maintenance of IMIS is a continuing function and that the positions should therefore not be funded under general temporary assistance.

42. Section 5, United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 includes 25 positions funded under general temporary assistance. The Advisory Committee reiterates its opinion that the posts should have been disclosed in the staffing table as temporary posts.

43. With regard to the 19 positions proposed for the Cambodian office for Human Rights and the two for that of the Special Rapporteur in Rwanda, the Advisory Committee is of the view that these positions should be reviewed in the biennium 2000-2001.

44. The 12 security officer positions at the United Nations Office at Nairobi have existed for more than 20 years. The argument that they should be funded under general temporary assistance is, in the opinion of the Advisory Committee, specious and therefore they should be charged against established posts. The 22 support positions at the subregional development centres of the Economic Commission for Africa, covering such functions as cleaners, telephone operators, messengers and drivers, which also have existed for an extended period of time, clearly represent continuing need and do not fall within the framework of general temporary assistance. These services should either be outsourced, if feasible, or charged to temporary posts. As regards the 22 new security officer positions, it is the opinion of the Advisory Committee that the need for the officers has been identified and that that need is not likely to change in the near future, therefore those positions should be temporary posts.

Notes

¹ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/54/7).*

² *Ibid.*, para. 1S3.4.

³ *Ibid.*, para. VIII.58.

⁴ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/50/7).*

⁵ *Ibid.*, *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/52/7/Rev.1).*

⁶ *Ibid.*, *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/54/6/Rev.1)*, vol. III, para. 26.53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, *Supplement No. 21A (A/54/21/Add.1).*